WILLIAM A. MUNDELL CHAIRMAN JIM IRVIN COMMISSIONER MARC SPITZER COMMISSIONER



ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION

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OBJAN C. MCNEIL
EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

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AZ CORP COMMISSION DOCUMENT CONTROL

DATE:

AUGUST 15, 2001

DOCKET NO:

W-02859A-00-0964

TO ALL PARTIES:

Enclosed please find the recommendation of Administrative Law Judge Philip Dion. The recommendation has been filed in the form of an Order on:

DIVERSIFIED WATER UTILITIES, INC. (FINANCE)

Pursuant to A.A.C. R14-3-110(B), you may file exceptions to the recommendation of the Administrative Law Judge by filing an original and ten (10) copies of the exceptions with the Commission's Docket Control at the address listed below by 12:00 p.m. on or before:

AUGUST 17, 2001

The enclosed is <u>NOT</u> an order of the Commission, but a recommendation of the Administrative Law Judge to the Commissioners. Consideration of this matter has <u>tentatively</u> been scheduled for the Commission's Working Session and Open Meeting to be held on:

AUGUST 28, 2001 AND AUGUST 29, 2001

For more information, you may contact Docket Control at (602)542-3477 or the Hearing Division at (602)542-4250.

Arizona Corporation Commission

DOCKETED

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DOCKETED BY

BRIAN C. McNEIK

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

BEFORE THE ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSION

WILLIAM A. MUNDELL CHAIRMAN JIM IRVIN COMMISSIONER MARC SPITZER COMMISSIONER

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION OF DIVERSIFIED WATER UTILITIES, INC., AN ARIZONA CORPORATION, FOR AUTHORITY TO ISSUE DEBT.

DOCKET NO. W-02859A-00-0964

DECISION NO. _____

ORDER

Open Meeting August 28 and 29, 2001 Phoenix, Arizona

BY THE COMMISSION:

On November 27, 2000, Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. ("Diversified", "Applicant" or "Company") filed an application for debt financing with the Arizona Corporation Commission ("Commission") requesting authorization to issue long-term debt in the amount of \$378,900 to the Water Infrastructure Financing Authority ("WIFA") and to issue short-term debt in the amount of \$58,428.30 to Skyline Vista Ranch, L.L.C. ("Skyline" or "Developer"). The total amount of debt in the original application was \$437,328.30.

On April 18, 2001, Staff filed its Staff Report in the matter, recommending approval of the application without a hearing.

On April 26, 2001, Diversified filed an affidavit indicating it provided notice of its application on April 17, 2001, through a direct mailing to each of its customers.

In June 2001, Diversified notified the Commission's Utilities Division Staff ("Staff") that the amount of debt financing it needed would be reduced. Diversified now requests authorization to issue long-term debt in the amount of \$353,900 to WIFA and to issue short-term debt in the amount of \$58,428.30 to Skyline. The new total amount of debt requested in this application is \$412,328.30.

On July 20, 2001, Staff filed an amended Staff Report ("Amended Report") in the matter, again recommending approval of the application without a hearing. The Amended Report was generated to update the docket regarding the change in the WIFA portion of the financing.

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Diversified is currently delivering water that does not exceed any maximum contaminant levels and meets the Safe Drinking Water Act quality requirements. Diversified is located in the Phoenix Active Management Area and is in compliance with its regulations.

DISCUSSION

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality ("ADEO") has determined that

Introduction

Diversified provides water utility service to approximately 177 customers in Pinal County. Diversified's Certificate of Convenience and Necessity ("CC&N") was originally granted to Ellsworth Land and Livestock, Inc. in Decision No. 33633-A (January 30, 1962). It was subsequently transferred to Diversified in Decision No. 59133 (June 27, 1995). Diversified's current rates were approved in Decision No. 60219 on May 27, 1997, based on a 1995 test year when Diversified only served 43 customers. If Diversified's historical growth rate continues, it could have 355 customers by the end of 2005.

In Decision No. 60219, Diversified was ordered to reduce unaccounted water loss to 15 percent or less by its next rate filing. Staff Engineering indicated that based on data provided by Diversified, the unaccounted water loss on the system for the year 2000 was at 15 percent. Engineering Staff states that this level is still too high, but also notes that "good progress" is being made.

In Decision No. 61580 (March 15, 1999), Diversified was granted an Off-site Facilities Hookup Fee that provided for hook-up fees ranging from \$850 for a 5/8-inch by 3/4-inch meter to \$34,000 for a 6-inch meter. At that time, Diversified had recently added 50 customers. The purpose of the hook-up fees, as set forth in the Decision, was to put Diversified "in a much better position to add the required backbone plant to serve this relatively large amount of growth."

Purpose of Financing

The Proposed WIFA Debt A.

Diversified is within WIFA's fundable range for a loan up to \$378,900. Initially, the funds from the WIFA loan would be used to make improvements on the system including the purchase and installation of a 250,000-gallon storage tank, a well, a pressure tank, booster pumps and a 12-inch

distribution line. Currently, Diversified's system consists of one 120-gallon per minute well, one 5,000-gallon pressure tank, two 10 horsepower booster pumps and one 20,000-gallon storage tank.

Engineering Staff strongly recommends that this financing be approved. Currently, Diversified is short in storage capacity by at least 35,000 gallons and its existing well can only serve another 220 customers. These storage capacity limitations will be exacerbated if the Skyline development, which is discussed below, is added to Diversified's system. Engineering Staff predicts that Diversified will have a serious water shortage crisis in less than five years if the current growth rate continues and the Company does not expand its system in the near future. Engineering Staff has reviewed the WIFA application and, based on Diversified's current growth rate, considers the proposed projects and the associated costs reasonable.

The Amended Report indicates that Diversified has completed the installation of a 200,000-gallon storage tank, at a cost that is \$25,000 less than the planned 250,000-gallon storage tank. Engineering Staff believes the smaller tank will be sufficient and that the cost is reasonable. Diversified will amend its application to WIFA to reduce the requested debt from \$378,900 to \$353,900.

B. The Proposed Skyline Debt

The loan from Skyline will be used to partially fund a 12-inch and 8-inch interconnection and line extension. The total cost of the project will be \$131,109.30. Diversified and Skyline entered into an agreement in which Skyline will advance \$72,681, or 55 percent of the cost of the project, as an aid to construction. The remaining \$58,428.30 would be loaned to Diversified by Skyline.

Engineering Staff has reviewed the Skyline application and considers the proposed projects and the associated costs reasonable.

Terms of Debt

A. The Proposed WIFA Debt

The proposed WIFA loan, as amended pursuant to the information in the Amended Report, will be for an amount of up to \$353,900. Although the final terms and conditions of the WIFA loan will not be known until the time the loan is funded, it is anticipated that the term of the loan will be twenty years with an interest rate equal to 70.0 percent of the prime rate. At the time of the Staff

assumed to be 6.0 percent.

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The Proposed Skyline Debt B.

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The amount of the proposed Skyline debt is \$58,428.30. The terms of the Skyline loan consist of an interest rate of 8.0 percent and a maturity date of five years. The short duration of the loan and its associated loan payment would substantially impact the Company's cash flow. The loan agreement was negotiated between the parties at arms length, and Diversified is not affiliated with, nor is it a subsidiary of Skyline.

Report, the prime rate was 8.5 percent. Therefore, the estimated interest rate on the WIFA loan was

Capital Structure and Financial Impact

Diversified supplied "compiled" 1999 financial statements with the application. According to Diversified's auditors, compiled financial statements are limited to presenting "information that is the representation of management" and they had neither audited, nor reviewed the financial statements. Compiled statements are used because of the prohibitive cost of audited financial statements.

According to the Staff Report, the 1999 compiled financial statements reflect a company in poor financial health. Diversified owed approximately \$100,000 in debt and had negative equity of (\$22,000). Diversified also suffered a net loss of (\$1,700) for the year.

Subsequently, Diversified supplied Staff with compiled financial statements for the year 2000. These statements reflect a company in better financial health than in 1999. Equity increased from a negative (\$22,000) to a positive \$33,000. Net income increased from a loss of (\$1,700) to a positive \$15,319. An increase in revenues of approximately \$10,000, and the elimination of certain salaries and payables to shareholders accomplished this turnaround.

Based on the new information in the Amended Report, Staff estimated that Diversified needs approximately \$47,000 a year for the first five years to service the proposed additional debt of \$412,328.30. After five years, the Skyline loan will have been paid off and therefore, only approximately \$30,000 per year will be required to service the WIFA loan.

Currently, Diversified is only generating \$22,000 in cash per year that can be applied for debt service towards the proposed debt. Staff was concerned about the ability of Diversified to service the proposed debt. Staff requested more information from Diversified including an explanation of how

Diversified would have the means to make timely payments on the proposed debt. Diversified responded that it would rely on the \$850 "connection fee" to generate the funds and, if necessary, the President of Diversified was willing to "continue deferring payment of salary." Diversified stated the growth in its area will generate new hook-up fees and revenues that will be sufficient to make up the difference between cash uses and cash sources.

Diversified provided Staff with a copy of a written request for service sent by a representative of Skyline to Diversified, Salt River Project, Qwest, the City of Mesa and Cox, for planning purposes. Skyline expects to build three phases of a subdivision "as soon as they obtain all of the required approvals." Diversified also supplied Staff with information that it has averaged 35 to 45 new 5/8-inch by 3/4-inch meter connections per year. Diversified expects this trend to continue because of the new Skyline subdivision. Therefore, Diversified states it expects to generate between \$29,750 to \$38,250 in connection fees per year for the foreseeable future. Although hook-up fee revenues have historically been used by the Company for system upgrades, those funds will now be needed to help service the proposed debt. If the new subdivision materializes, Diversified will experience increased revenues from hook-up fees and new customer usage.

As a measure of financial soundness, Staff examined the effects of the proposed debt in relation to Diversified's Debt Service Coverage ("DSC") ratio. That ratio measures the number of times cash flow will cover principal and interest payments. In 2000, Diversified's DSC was 4.5.

Under the Company's proposal, the anticipated annual principal and interest payment related to the debt for the first year would be \$47,000 and the projected DSC ratio is 0.70. That number is below 1.00, indicating that Diversified may not be able to service the proposed debt.

Diversified's 2000 year-end capital structure was approximately 43 percent total debt and 57 percent equity. The addition of the proposed debt would raise the percentage of total debt from 43 percent to 93 percent and lower equity from 57 percent to 7 percent.

Staff suggested that Diversified apply for a rate increase to assure cash flow necessary for debt service. Diversified expressed great reluctance to increase rates for this purpose. It prefers to rely upon hook-up fees and usage revenues from the new connections for those funds.

Although recognizing Diversified's reluctance to raise rates, Staff believes there is some risk,

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as is common in the real estate industry, that some or all of the planned subdivision will not materialize and that current customers, under current rates, may not generate sufficient revenues to adequately cover debt service related to the proposed debt. However, since the current rates paid by Diversified's customers are significant, and due to Diversified's reluctance to raise rates, Staff recommended an alternative solution.

Staff recommended that Diversified file a cash flow statement in the docket by July 31, 2002, for Staff's review. Staff also recommended that the Commission approve the total amount of debt requested by Diversified with the additional condition that, if Diversified does not generate sufficient positive cash flow to service its debt by June 30, 2002, it will file for a rate increase by September 30, 2002. Staff indicates these conditions should reduce the risk of financial harm that Diversified would experience if the additional customers do not materialize.

Based on the above conditions, Staff recommended approval of Diversified's application for approval to issue long-term debt in the amount of \$353,900 to the Water Infrastructure Financing Authority and short-term debt in the amount of \$58,428.30 to Skyline Vista Ranch, L.L.C. Staff believes that the proposed debt is in the public interest, is compatible with sound financial practices and should be approved without a hearing.

Analysis

Under the Company's proposed debt financing, its capital structure would be 93 percent debt and 7 percent equity. Those figures are not representative of a financially healthy company. Those numbers are troublesome, especially since, under the Company's proposal, Diversified is relying upon revenues and hook-up fees generated from projected growth in its service area. Staff agrees that the Company's growth projections are speculative and may not materialize and therefore, reliance on projected hook-up fees carries some associated risks. Additionally, the fact that a majority of the money generated from hook-up fees will have to be used to pay down the debt, indicating that Diversified may not have enough cash on hand to pay for unforeseen expenses, causes us concern.

We find that the Company shall be allowed to proceed with the WIFA loan, however, Diversified's request to enter into the short-term loan with Skyline will not be approved. As a condition of our authorization to obtain the WIFA loan, the Company must receive an infusion of

capital. Therefore, if the Company wishes to proceed with the WIFA loan, it must fund the Skyline portion of the loan with equity.

While the addition of approximately \$60,000 in equity does not raise the Company's DSC ratio to 1.0 and does not create a capital structure of 60 percent debt and 40 percent equity, it accomplishes the goals of providing new plant and maintaining some financial stability. In this case, the Commission will approve a level of debt that results in an annual principal and interest payment related to the debt of approximately \$30,000, a DSC ratio of 0.99 and a capital structure of approximately 80 percent debt and 20 percent equity.

Although the Company's resulting DSC ratio will not be above 1.0, the number of new hook-ups and the associated fees and revenues needed to cover the debt payments will likely be obtainable based upon past, current and predicted future growth in Diversified's service area. Moreover, if Diversified does not experience the type of growth to allow it to pay for this debt, and a rate case is subsequently filed, any impact on rate payers will be significantly less than under the scenario proposed by the Company.

In this Order, the Commission has tried to balance the needs of the Company to accommodate the growth in its service area, the financial impact to the Company of acquiring debt to pay for plant additions, the reluctance of Diversified to file a rate case, the impact of a rate case on current customers of Diversified and who should bear the risk that future development does not occur as expected. The Commission, in formulating this Order, has tried to balance all of those competing interests. Further, we believe that this Decision enhances the Company's financial condition and thereby increases the likelihood of the Company obtaining the WIFA loan.

Accordingly, given the Company's financial condition, we believe that an infusion of equity is appropriate and should be made a condition of the approval of the WIFA financing. This will help enhance the Company's financial condition and ensure that current ratepayers will not bear the costs of the proposed developments that may never materialize.

* * * * * * * *

Having considered the entire record herein and being fully advised in the premises, the Commission finds, concludes, and orders that:

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FINDINGS OF FACT

- 1. Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. is water company that serves approximately 177 customers in Pinal County.
- 2. On November 27, 2000, Diversified filed an application for debt financing with the Commission requesting authorization to issue long-term debt in the amount of \$378,900 to the Water Infrastructure Financing Authority and to issue short-term debt in the amount of \$58,428.30 to Skyline Vista Ranch, L.L.C. The total amount of debt in the original application was \$437,328.30.
- 3. In June 2001, Diversified notified Staff that the amount of debt financing it needed would be reduced. Diversified now requests authorization to issue long-term debt in the amount of \$353,900 to WIFA and to issue short-term debt in the amount of \$58,428.30 to Skyline. The new total amount of debt requested in this application is \$412,328.30.
- 4. On April 26, 2001, Diversified filed an affidavit indicating it provided notice of its application on April 17, 2001, through a direct mailing to each of its customers.
- 5. On April 18, 2001, Staff filed its Staff Report in the matter, recommending approval of the application without a hearing.
- 6. On July 20, 2001, Staff filed an amended Staff Report in the matter, again recommending approval of the application without a hearing. The Amended Report was generated to update the docket regarding the WIFA portion of the financing.
- 7. The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality has determined that Diversified is currently delivering water that does not exceed any maximum contaminant levels and meets the Safe Drinking Water Act quality requirements. Diversified is located in the Phoenix Active Management Area and is in compliance with its regulations.
- 8. Based on the Amended Report, the funds from the WIFA loan would be used to pay for improvements on the system including the purchase and installation of a 200,000-gallon storage tank, a well, a pressure tank, booster pumps and a 12-inch distribution line.
- 9. Engineering Staff predicts that Diversified will have a serious water shortage crisis in less than five years if the current growth rate continues and the Company does not expand its system in the near future. Engineering Staff has reviewed the WIFA application and, based on Diversified's

current growth rate, considers the proposed projects and the associated costs reasonable.

- 10. The loan from Skyline would be used to partially fund a 12-inch and 8-inch interconnection and line extension. The total cost of the project will be \$131,109.30. Diversified and Skyline entered into an agreement in which Skyline will advance \$72,681, or 55 percent of the cost of the project, as an aid to construction. The remaining \$58,428.30 would be loaned to Diversified by Skyline. Engineering Staff has reviewed the Skyline application and considers the proposed projects and the associated costs reasonable.
- 11. The project will help Diversified meet expected future growth of customers, improve existing reliability and increase system service.
- 12. Based on the Amended Report, the WIFA loan is for an amount of up to \$353,900. Although the final terms and conditions of the WIFA loan will not be known until the time the loan is funded, it is anticipated that the term of the loan will be twenty years with an interest rate equal to 70.0 percent of the prime rate. At the time of the Staff Report, the current prime rate was 8.5 percent. Therefore, the estimated interest rate on the WIFA loan was assumed to be 6.0 percent.
- 13. The amount of the proposed Skyline debt is \$58,428.30. The terms of the Skyline loan consist of an interest rate of 8.0 percent and a maturity date of five years.
- 14. Based on the new information in the Amended Report, Staff estimated that Diversified needs approximately \$47,000 a year for the first five years to service the proposed additional debt of \$412,328.30.
- 15. Currently, Diversified is only generating \$22,000 in cash per year that can be applied for debt service towards the proposed debt.
- 16. Diversified stated the growth in its area will generate new hook-up fees and revenues that will be sufficient to make up the difference between cash uses and cash sources.
- 17. Diversified expects to generate between \$29,750 and \$38,250 in connection fees per year for the foreseeable future. Although hook-up fee revenues have historically been used by the Company for system upgrades, those funds will now be needed to help service the proposed debt.
- 18. There is some risk, as is common in the real estate industry, that some or all of the projected growth in Diversified's service area, and the associated hook-up fees and revenues, will not

- 19. The Company's current DSC is 4.5.
- 20. Under the Company's proposal, the projected DSC ratio is 0.70. That number is below 1.00, indicating that Diversified may not be able to service the proposed debt.
- Diversified's 2000 year-end capital structure was approximately 43 percent total debt and 57 percent equity. The addition of the proposed debt would raise the percentage of total debt from 43 percent to 93 percent and lower equity from 57 percent to 7 percent.
- 22. Staff recommended that Diversified file a cash flow statement in the docket by July 31, 2002, for Staff's review.
- 23. Staff also recommended that the Commission approve the total amount of debt requested by Diversified with the additional condition that if Diversified does not generate sufficient positive cash flow to service its debt by June 30, 2002, it will file for a rate increase by September 30, 2002.
- 24. We find that the issuance of debt for the Skyline project is not consistent with sound financial practices and it is not in the public interest.
 - 25. Diversified's request for approval of the Skyline financing should be denied.
- 26. Diversified's request for the approval of the WIFA financing should be approved on the condition that the Company is infused with capital in the amount of at least \$58,428.30, by funding its portion of its agreement with Skyline.
- As a result of infusing capital, the annual principal and interest payment related to the WIFA debt would be approximately \$30,000, the Company's DSC ratio would be 0.99 and its capital structure would be approximately 80 percent debt and 20 percent equity.
- 28. In arriving at its conclusion, the Commission weighed the following factors: the growth in Diversified's service area, the financial impact to the Company of acquiring debt to pay for plant additions, the reluctance of Diversified to file a rate case, the impact of a rate case on current customers of Diversified and who should bear the risk that future development does not occur as expected.
 - 29. If Diversified does not experience the type of growth to allow it to pay for this debt,

and a rate case is subsequently filed, any impact on rate payers will be significantly less than under the scenario proposed by the Company.

30. The Company's infusion of capital will help enhance the Company's financial condition and ensure that current ratepayers will not bear the costs of the proposed developments that may never materialize.

CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

- 1. Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. is a public service corporation within the meaning of Article XV of the Arizona Constitution and A.R.S. §§ 40-301 and 40-302.
- 2. The Commission has jurisdiction over Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. and the subject matter of the application.
 - 3. Notice of the application was given in accordance with the law.
- 4. The financing approved herein is for lawful purposes within Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. corporate powers, is compatible with the public interest, with sound financial practices, and with the proper performance by Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. of service as a public service corporation, and will not impair Diversified Water Utilities, Inc.'s ability to perform that service.
- 5. The financing approved herein is for the purposes stated in the application and is reasonably necessary for those purposes, and such purposes are not, wholly or in part, reasonably chargeable to operating expenses or to income.

ORDER

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED that Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. is hereby authorized to obtain \$353,900 in long-term financing from the Water Infrastructure Financing Authority for a period of 20 years at an interest rate to be set at the prevailing rate at the date of the draw, only if Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. infuses the company with at least \$58,428.30 in equity by funding its portion of the agreement with Skyline. Prior to Diversified Water Utilities, Inc.'s drawing down any money from WIFA, it must have already infused the company with said equity and that equity must be used for the above stated purpose.

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Diversified Water Utilities, Inc. shall file a cash flow statement in the docket by July 31, 2002, for Staff's review.

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1	SERVICE LIST FOR:	DIVERSIFIED WATER UTILITIES, INC.
2	DOCKET NO.:	W-02859A-00-0964
3 4 5	William P. Sullivan MARTINEZ & CURTIS, P.C. 2712 North 7 th Street Phoenix, Arizona 85006-1090	
6 7 8	Christopher Kempley, Chief Counsel Legal Division ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSIO 1200 West Washington Street	N
9	Phoenix, Arizona 85007	
10	Deborah Scott, Director Utilities Division ARIZONA CORPORATION COMMISSIO	N
11	1200 West Washington Street Phoenix, Arizona 85007	
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